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ABSTRACT

To accomplish successful communicative foreign language teaching, a teacher needs more than a sound command of the language and thorough training in communicative methodology. He or she also needs training in self-presentation, exposure to situations in which the importance of non-verbal behavior is made clear, and discussion of the fundamental role of interactive skills in foreign language teaching. The teacher must learn both verbal and non-verbal skills for interacting with students. One must become aware of one's non-verbal signals (facial expression, posture, gestures, general movement, physical proximity to students, and voice qualities), both to prevent them from confusing or threatening students and to use them in support of essential classroom interaction. The teacher also needs three basic interactive skills: willingness to learn from one's students; empathy; and the ability to react to students' remarks or replies in an accepting manner. These should be part of both preservice and inservice teacher training programs. The incident method, involving the discussion and resolution of specific interaction incidents, may help to enlarge the teacher's capacity for observation and sensitivity to interaction or group processes. (MSE)

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THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH TO FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING. THE TEACHER'S CASE

Dora Dolle & Gerard M. Willems

Introduction

"Whether or not a course is communicative will depend as much on its methodology as on the pedigree of its syllabus" says Keith Johnson in his Communicative Syllabus Design & Methodology (p. 106) and we quite agree with him. We would like to add, however, that this conviction entails a host of personal and professional implications for the foreign language teacher which cannot simply be grouped under the heading 'methodological know-how'.

In traditional, structurally-oriented, foreign language teaching the subject matter to be taught is usually given such priority that the methodology has been mainly geared to avoidance of errors i.e.

to excluding, as much as possible, opportunities for the learner to "go wrong" in using the language. Knowledge about language form is much more important than the ability to use language meaningfully i.e. functionally. This goes for learner and teacher alike and thus interaction processes in the foreign language between teacher and learner and between learners are not generally viewed as supportive of or even essential to the learning process.

In communicative foreign language teaching, however, with its stress on developing the learner's capacity to negotiate meaning in the foreign language, these interaction processes obviously become much more vital. They reinforce motivation in the learner to use the foreign language for real communication and help him to acquire it as a means of communication in addition to his first language.

The above consideration makes heavy demands on the teacher's personal and professional qualities and competencies. For his (!) teaching to be effective the teacher is not only dependent on his knowledge of and experiences with methodologies that are conducive to the development of the learner's communicative competence: he needs to know about the results of research in the field of language acquisition and needs to be able to decide what methodology is suited to what learning process (Competence in the Theory of Learning); he needs insight into and training in directing learning processes and in creating a suitable classroom climate (Pedagogical competence), and, finally, he needs a modicum of self-knowledge and the ability to reflect on his functioning in the classroom (Psychological competence). Education, at all times, depends on interaction between teacher and learner. And, of course, this is especially true of communicative foreign language teaching. Therefore, the teacher's attitude to and insight into his role in interaction processes are of vital importance. Possession of the above competencies is a prerequisite for a language teacher's success in acquiring such an attitude and insight.

In interaction processes it is not only what we say, our verbal behaviour, but also what we communicate paralinguistically, through 'body-

language' or, generally speaking, non-verbally, that is at least as important for the communication. The acknowledgement of the vital role of both verbal and non-verbal behaviour in the interaction which is so necessary in the foreign language class, has implications for the teacher and his professional (re)training. These implications will be discussed below in terms of the teacher's self-presentation, his non-verbal behaviour and his interactive skills. By way of conclusion a description will be given of a well-tried and successful training method meant to help the teacher become aware of his (non)-verbal behaviour and its effects on others. This training method is intended at the same time to help him develop new types of behaviour and acquire new socio-interactive and didactic skills that are prerequisites for the creation of educationally useful classroom interaction.

Interaction

1. Preamble

It is now a commonplace in communicative foreign language teaching to say that a teacher needs to be able to create a classroom atmosphere that is conducive to real communication. This involves there being an absence of penalties on errors through marking and the creation of a feeling in the learner that his personality and what he has to say is accepted. It thus also involves the learner's feeling free to experiment with the language (2). He should feel motivated to contribute to the learning process in the class even to the point of literally bringing in teaching material. He should be made to feel open to new experiences and open to the foreign medium as something he may use to express himself emotionally (3). He should not be made to feel constrained by the unmanageability of the tasks he is set (Dolle, Menting & Willems, 1983).

For the teacher all this means that he will have to acquaint himself with what makes each individual learner "tick", with his thoughts, emotions and behaviour. In addition he also needs to be able to show his learners what makes him "tick" himself. By their personal participation teachers can stimulate the interaction in the classroom that is

the very life-blood of communicative foreign language teaching. If a foreign language teacher is unwilling to invest himself in real communication with his learners he can never hope to be a successful "communicative" teacher.

A teacher, often unwittingly, emits verbal and non-verbal signals that are often decisive for the success of his "communicative" class. He will have to be (made) aware that he does so and will have to be trained to become aware especially of his non-verbal behaviour. He will have to be enabled to find out what sort of behaviour inspires his learners or frustrates and blocks them (4). He will need to correlate his verbal and non-verbal behaviour and to avoid presenting himself for instance as feeling (tensely) safe behind his desk on the dais while professing to his pupils that they need to be free, relaxed and, above all, quite themselves.

A teacher also needs training in observing pupils, in listening to them encouragingly, empathetically and also in keeping his mouth shut at the right moments, thus offering his learners the necessary lee-way.

2. Self-presentation

Non-verbal messages may be a considerable help to the teacher in clarifying his thoughts and emotions and they may support or, on the contrary, contradict what he says. Non-verbal signals may also stimulate the interaction process in the classroom. If a teacher is vivacious and mobile and if he shows non-verbally that he enjoys cooperating with his pupils he will undoubtedly stimulate interaction.
At the same time the teacher will show signs of disappointment, uncertainty, irritation or objection non-verbally. It is hard to hide these emotions so it is better that they should be voiced, thereby stimulating the thoughts and emotions of both teacher and pupils, which in turn may lead to mutual understanding.

It is important for the teacher to be aware of his own non-verbal signals, on the one hand to prevent them from confusing or even threatening his pupils, on the other to use them as a positive support of

the interaction that is so necessary especially in a foreign language class. Training in the use of non-verbal behaviour to avoid its negative and stimulate its positive influence on interaction, can be given to the student with the help of video and through feedback from his fellow-students and/or supervisors.

Argyle (1975) mentions a few aspects of self-presentation. It may take place verbally and non-verbally. The non-verbal signals appear to be much more decisive than the verbal, but both are of primary importance as pupils will learn better and show the desired development if they have confidence in the teacher who, in interaction with his pupils, leaves no doubt as to who he is and where he stands. In the initial stages a teacher can present himself verbally by giving information about himself, giving his opinion and voicing his feelings. Interaction is, of course, also stimulated if, conversely, the teacher shows a certain amount of interest in his pupils. If they only experience their teacher as a matter-of-fact specialist in the foreign language, it will be rather difficult for them to muster understanding and feeling for him as a human being and to show these in certain situations. Student reactions are like a mirror in which a teacher can see how successful he is. He will be out to project on to his pupils the image that he has of himself as a skilled professional. If he notices that his pupils obviously do not see eye-to-eye with him on that score he should work more consciously on his self-presentation. As stated above, trying to reduce the disparity between the self-image that is reflected back to him by his pupils and the ideal image that he may strive after, is the best way to set about this.

2.1. Non-verbal behaviour

According to Grell (1976) classroom-teaching takes place through interaction and communication between teacher and pupils. Non-verbal behaviour plays an enormously important role in this interaction. Knapp (1972) says: "The classroom is a veritable goldmine of non-verbal behaviour, which has been relatively untapped by scientific probes." Why should it be so important, above all in the foreign language class

whose aim is the development of communicative competence? Grell (1976) enumerates a number of reasons for the importance of non-verbal behaviour for teaching in general, which we have adapted to the communicative teaching of a foreign language:

a. In communication between human beings non-verbal signals appear to be much more decisive than verbal ones. Facial expression and "body language" appear to be much more eloquent than the spoken word. As stated under 2 there must be a correlation between verbal and non-verbal behaviour in the teacher if he wants to avoid confusing or threatening his pupils by appearing dishonest to them.

b. Non-verbal behaviour is less consciously controllable than verbal behaviour. Thus a teacher may unconsciously have a negative influence on a pupil's social- and learning behaviour by non-verbally emitting negative expectations or opinions about him. In view of this it is clear how important control of non-verbal signals is, especially in communicative foreign language teaching.

c. For language acquisition it is important for the learner to be in a position where he can safely "try out" his command of the foreign language vis-à-vis his teacher. It is therefore of great value for the teacher to know how to be non-verbally stimulating in the interaction process, giving his learners optimal opportunities to speak. Looking at a pupil, nodding, smiling and "rewarding" certain behaviours are some of these non-verbal stimuli.

d. Some teachers or trainees may need to be made aware of the fact that they have subconsciously developed non-verbal behaviour that has a negative influence on communication. Some teachers have developed a certain "classroom look" or certain other non-verbal ideosyncracies that may irritate pupils. Making these teachers aware of their behaviour may be an important step towards more successful communicative teaching.

e. There are indications that a certain amount of vivacity and mobility on the part of the teacher facilitates the learning of his pupils. Whether or not a teacher makes a stiff and stuffy impression on his learners is to a large degree decided by his non-verbal behaviour.

2.2. Aspects of non-verbal behaviour

We behave non-verbally by means of the muscular structure of our face and body. Thus our gaze determined by our eye-muscles, may indicate that we wish to stimulate interaction. Eye-contact, or the avoidance of it, plays a decisive role in the degree of interaction we may be able to create. A glance may further be kind or inviting, hesitant or fearful, critical or hostile and invite corresponding behaviour in pupils.

The facial muscles determine our facial expression. Whether a teacher looks serious or kind, solemn or smiling may mean a lot for what kind of interaction he will stimulate in his classroom. Some teachers have by nature expressive and mobile faces, others will have to make an effort to make their faces "talk". Speech therapy is commonly considered as very important for those teachers whose voices leave something to be desired. For teachers with rather immobile faces training in using the facial muscles while speaking and looking should be considered at least as important.

Posture, determined by our bodily muscles, betrays how relaxed or tense we are. Pupils are quick to spot the uncertain teacher. What we do with our hands, supporting what we say, writing on the blackbord or the overhead projector or just holding a book is very telling about how we feel. Gestures in this context, show something of the dynamics of our personality and, if not overdone, may have a stimulating effect on classroom interaction. A teacher may signal accessibility or the reverse by letting his hands dangle or crossing his arms or putting them akimbo, and should be aware of these effects of his body language. Moving about too much in the classroom may cause unrest, while immobility of the teacher cannot guarantee concentrated commitment of the learners. He will have to find a way to steer clear of these two extremes in order to create optimal interaction conditions.

Closeness to the pupils in the sense of physical proximity is also of major influence on interaction. Physical proximity makes interaction more personal. So moving about in a classroom full of working pupils

may lead to real and personal interaction in the foreign language.

Until pupils have developed a sense of knowing their teacher personally, they will judge him largely by his outward appearance. They compare him with other teachers and base their judgement on this comparison. Prejudices may thereby be born on the basis of the teacher's outward appearance. The teacher should know about this.

A teacher's voice is probably the most striking facet of his personality. His voice, just like his glance, gives away a lot about him. Our rate of speaking and the loudness of our voice may "speak volumes" about what moves us at a particular moment. Many teachers have a typical classroom voice, with a classroom intonation (Brazil, Coulthard & Johns, 1980) which is quite different from the voice they use in individual contact with pupils. Listening to sound recordings of their classroom speaking may prove a shock to beginning as well as experienced teachers.

Paying attention to these aspects of non-verbal behaviour is necessary for the teacher who wants to raise the level of interaction in his classroom, certainly if he does so in the interest of communicative foreign language teaching.

2.3. Interactive Skills

Next to insight into how best to present himself interactionally and how non-verbal behaviour influences interaction, the teacher needs at least three basic interactive skills.

The first is an overt willingness to learn from his learners instead of solely starting from the premise that a teacher is there to teach. If cooperation in a "communicative" foreign language class is so utterly vital, a teacher should realise that it can only be established if he is also willing to learn from his pupils, to be open to their world and their experiences. Only in this way will he acquire the credibility with his pupils that is so necessary to make real communication possible.

A second very important interactional skill is the skill of empathy,

the ability to open up to other people's ideas and emotions, to imagine how they experience things, in short knowing what makes them tick. Inability to empathize may be caused by:

- merely being tuned in to one's own private problems;
- being mainly directed to judging other people;
- having an extreme wish to 'educate' other people or rather indoctrinate them;
- having too little time or inner peace to be really attentive to other people's experiences;
- having a strong tendency to defend one's own prestige or superiority;
- thinking that others have to be like oneself;
- cherishing prejudices, or the fear that understanding other people is the same as being permissive.

Asking himself which of these points applies to himself might be a start for the teacher to becoming empathetic.

The last interactive skill to be dealt with here is concerned with reacting to pupils' remarks or replies in an accepting manner. This is very important in the learner-centred classroom activities that are invaluable for communicative foreign language teaching. A teacher should deal with what his learners say in a respectful way so that they will learn optimally from whatever mistakes they make instead of shutting themselves off. The teacher shows that he is taking learners' remarks or replies seriously by using them as language material that may be important to other learners and by giving reasons why a certain remark or reply is erroneous or faulty.

3. The Incident Method

The incident method (5) is a training method which may help the (future) teacher, more than an ordinary evaluation session after a period of schoolpractice, to become aware of his self-presentation, his non-verbal behaviour, his interactive skills and their effect on his learners.

The incident method is a didactic procedure which consists mainly of

small-group discussions of certain incidents. The incidents in this context are small events from the practice of teaching. The incident method helps the (future) teacher to enlarge his observation capacity, his sensitivity to and insight into interaction and/or groupprocesses. It may thus lead to new behaviour and the discovery of alternative possibilities in his personality. Some teachers when trying out communicative methodologies come to the conclusion that the communicative approach is not a viable alternative to the structural approach. This may be due to the fact that these teachers have not made the non-verbal and interactional behaviour demanded by the communicative approach an integral part of their personality. The incident method may prove a help to them.

The object of the incident method is to enable the participants, through the analysis and evaluation of small events drawn from their teaching practice, to do the following:

- they learn to really appreciate somebody else's opinion (empathy);
- they learn to see the importance of what at face value seem trivial events;
- they learn to ask questions that are relevant to their (later) professional situation;
- they find and receive solutions to problems in dealing with a class;
- they realise that these problems can be solved in various ways depending on one's ideas about pupils and one's "philosophy of education";
- they learn what it is like to work with a method which can be used at all times to discuss teaching experiences.

The available time per session is 75 minutes, the size of the group is not to exceed 30 persons and each of them needs notepaper.

The procedure is as follows:

1. The first 20 minutes are used to choose an incident. This is done in the following way:
   a) Each participant writes down an incident in which he/she did not really know how to react, or when,with hindsight, he/she feels that he reacted inadequately. Conditions for choosing the

the incident are that it should have really happened to oneself, in exactly the way one describes it. It should also have happened unexpectedly. Its description should be free from any value-judgements and background problems and should be, above all, concise. It should have taken place rather recently, is to be presented in the present-tense and should be described up to the moment a decision was taken. By way of illustration here are two examples of incident descriptions:

- "I am returning from my lunch-break. My class are already there and are blocking my entrance from the inside as well as the outside" and:

  "In spite of repeated efforts to get my class to concentrate on what I am dealing with they remain restive. I utter a threat to throw out the first one who opens his mouth and immediately realise this is a rather unfortunate promise. Within seconds after my "threat" someone indeed opens his mouth".

b) Each participant reads out his own incident. The others take notes on it.

c) One incident is chosen by the group. Motives for selection might be that one recognizes a problem as one that one might encounter oneself or that one thinks one has a solution to.

2. The second 20 minute period is used for information. The group ask further information to get the situation clearer. Questions in this phase might be "How big is your class?", "Did your teaching go all right up to that point?". Questions that should not be asked are questions like" "Didn't you find the experience awful?", although questions which are not exclusively information-directed are permissible as long as the "orginator" of the incident does not "colour" the incident too much with subjective information. Absolutely forbidden are questions aimed at finding out how the teacher in question solved his problem.

3. Decision making and discussion.

a) Each participant writes down his/her own solution to the chosen incident. The exact wording of what he/she would say or do (non-

verbally!!) has to go down on paper and will have to be "delivered" when asked for.

b) The discussion-leader (teacher-trainer or colleague) tries to group the solutions roughly into categories like: agressive, avoiding, empathetic.

c) A discussion then takes place about solutions offered, along the lines of questions like: "Why should you do/say that; What sort of philosophy is behind it?"; "What effect do you expect?"

d) The participant whose incident was selected, then informs the group about which solution he chose at the time.

4. Evaluation (15 minutes).

a) The "originator" of the incident is asked in this place what he gained from the experience. He would also have to answer the question if he would react similarly as before if the incident happened again and why he would do so.

b) Each participant in turn then tries to tell the rest of the group what he has learnt from this technique (in the light of the objectives given on p. 96)

It might be interesting at this point in our argument to consider, by way of illustration, an incident that was recently brought into a group that one of the present authors was in charge of. The incident ran as follows:

"During a lesson in which the pupils are mainly occupied individually with doing communicative exercises and in which I am just lending a helping hand to some pupils, several questions on grammar are asked to which I do not know the answers."

The solutions that were offered by the participants were,in random order: - Ask if someone from the class knows the answer. If not, admit you do not know and will look up the answer;

- Admit that at that moment you cannot think of the answer, but will return to it in the following lesson;
- Admit that you do not know, look it up and explain during the following lesson;
- If you think there might be pupils who know, pass the question

on to the class and hope for the best (risky procedure!);
- Answer the questions as far as you can, say that you will look up the details;
- Give a quick answer and then ask what they know themselves. pass the question on to the class and think hard. Say that you will look it up to deal with it later;
- Leave the question unanswered until after class;
- Say what you think might be a plausible answer and ask good pupils to say what they think;
- Fob questioners off with a statement that these problems are too difficult to explain, that they concern minor grammatical points but that if they insist on a concreet answer you will return to them later;
- Just continue the lesson;
- Ask questions how they come to ask that particular question and promise you will return to their problems later as your answers will raise more problems than they solve.

From the variety of suggestion noted above it is not difficult to select several that neatly fall into the categories mentioned under 2.3. (Interactive Skills). In order to assess non-verbal behaviour participants could, for instance, react to the way in which other participants in the group "Act out" their solutions to the incident. Non-verbal behaviour that would be unsatisfactory from a communicative point of view could thus be located and discussed.

In conclusion some clear advantages and possible disadvantages of the incident method will be given. Experience has shown that the advantages are that
- all participants are actively and personally engaged in discussing the selected incident in contrast with their participation at one remove in studying "thought-up" cases and in role-plays;
- cooperation in the group is very intense;
- participants bring their own "material";
- participants learn to research a situation systematically;
- participants learn to accept more than one solution to a problem,

and they realise one is not alone in experiencing problems;
- participants learn to formulate questions carefully and to really listen to one another;
- the selection procedure forces participants to think not only about the problems of others but also about the incident that they themselves reported;
- following this method takes little preparation time on the part of the trainer; on the other hand it demands a certain skill in coaching small groups.

Possible disadvantages are that
- the incident method demands a large number of "contact hours" of the trainer;
- the participant whose incident is selected needs protection, certainly if his solution on the spot is at loggerheads with the solution prefered by the group;
- participants may find it hard to report their incident. They may experience this as relatively unsafe for their performance as teachers;
- the time available for the discovery of the deeper cause of the problem chosen, is, as a rule, too short, so that underlying processes that may be relevant cannot be sufficiently dealt with.

4. Conclusion

Summarising, it may be stated that for successful communicative foreign language teaching a teacher needs more than a sound command of the language and a thorough training in communicative methodology. Where Learning Theory Competence, Pedagogical Competence and Psychological competence and an insight (inherent in these three competencies) into ways of self presentation, into the importance of non-verbal behaviour and the value of interactive skills is important for all teaching, it is absolutely invaluable for communicative foreign language teaching. Training in ways of presenting themselves, exposure to situations in which they are made to realise the importance of non-verbal behaviour and discussion sessions on the fundamental role of interactive skills in FLT should therefore be made part and parcel

of pre-service and in-service programmes for foreign language teachers. In this article we hope we have made a convincing case for this thesis. We also hope that the practical suggestions may be of some use.

Notes

1. For reasons of economy and readability we have chosen for the masculine form where the feminine would be equally appropriate.
2. For how affective variables influence success in language acquisition see amongst other scholars like Dulay & Burt and Stevick; Stephen Krashen (1982) pp.30-32.
3. That foreign language learners are quite willing to express themselves affectively in the foreign language can, for instance, be seen quite clearly in Holland, where the younger generation has adopted: "oh, shit!" as a common expression of irritation. To English ears this may sound quite offensive but in Holland it is seen as a rather mild way of saying that you are fed up.
4. In this context it is important how the teacher formulates his question and reacts positively to his learners' answers.
5. A detailed description in Dutch of this method is to be found in Dolle, D.: "Oefenen met de Incident Methode: Een Alternatief voor het Ongestructureerd Uitwisselen van Praktijkervaringen" in Dekker, H. & Plicht, P. eds., Didactische Werkvormen in de Opleiding van Leerkrachten, Amsterdam 1983. What follows is a condensed version of this article.

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